

Bidwell Brook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113643
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	357384
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Mick Megee

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Maughn
Headteacher	Martin Dean
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2008
School address	Shinner's Bridge Dartington Totnes TQ9 6JU
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 12 lessons and taught by 11 teachers. Inspectors met with groups of pupils, parents and carers and with members of the governing body. Inspectors also took into account the questionnaire responses of 14 parents and carers, 21 pupils and 41 staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation, including development planning, pupils' performance data and records of risk assessments.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- It considered how well different groups of pupils enjoy learning and achieve in lessons.
- It considered whether teachers use assessment information effectively to set challenging targets and plan lessons.
- It examined the quality of curriculum planning and support given to pupils to see if these enable them to achieve the best they can and prepare them well for the future.
- It looked at how well current leaders are increasing the school's capacity to improve through tracking progress, identifying underachievement and taking robust remedial action.

Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with a statement of special educational needs for severe learning difficulties and for complex and profound needs. Some pupils have additional needs that include autistic spectrum disorder, physical disability, sensory impairment, speech and communication difficulties and behavioural, emotional & social difficulties. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children in the Reception Year. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2009. The school achieved specialist status for communication and interaction in September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Bidwell Brook is a good school that provides a friendly and harmonious learning environment and continues to improve its outcomes for pupils. Good teaching brings about good academic and personal achievement. Pupils enjoy coming to school because of the good and interesting range of subjects they are offered, as well as the warm welcome they receive. There are increasingly good opportunities for pupils to attend mainstream schools in order to further develop their social and academic skills.

Senior leaders have supported the new headteacher well and effectively share responsibility for the school's work. The team has maintained good morale around the school during the change of headteacher and continue to bring enthusiasm for learning into the life of the school and a solid commitment to improvement. The new system for tracking pupils' progress has increased the school's potential for accurate and thorough self-evaluation, which is now good. The governing body, most of whose members are new, effectively carries out its responsibilities and provides timely challenge and advice to the school. All these factors support well the school's good capacity to continue improving. However, the school is still at an early stage of implementing its plan to improve further its contribution to community cohesion, although there are some good outcomes for pupils in evidence.

The good care, guidance and support, including safeguarding and protecting pupils, ensure that pupils are safe and managed sensitively. The school responds well to the varying needs of pupils, particularly those who require a high level of personal attention, always paying regard to them in a way that respects their need for dignity. The school maintains good relationships with external services to provide medical, therapeutic and educational support to meet the needs of all the pupils. The partnership with parents and carers is good. They appreciate the contribution from the school, and trust the staff to do the best for their children. As one parent said, 'My son needed a lot of security when he came and this school provides exactly the right atmosphere. Now he even wants to learn to ride a bike ♦ that's a huge step forward.'

The staff's warm, compassionate and skilful approach in the Early Years Foundation Stage means that children joining the school below the age of five make good progress. Pupils continue to achieve well through to post-16. In a few lessons, teachers do not yet gather and use assessment information sufficiently well to match learning to the needs and capabilities of all the pupils. Many teachers make effective use of individual learning targets and these are set out clearly in the planning. In a few lessons, however, staff do not emphasise these targets consistently. This prevents pupils from knowing their next steps in learning and reaching these targets as quickly as they should. Nevertheless, pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE),

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and those in Key Stage 4 and at post-16 make good progress so that they go on to productive social, academic or vocational programmes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2011, improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - all teachers carry out continuous, daily assessment of pupils' learning and use this information to plan further well-matched activities
 - pupils, where appropriate, have an understanding of their next steps in learning and know when they have been successful.
- By Easter 2011, implement the plan to increase the school's contribution to community cohesion within and beyond, the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well and by the end of their schooling at post-16, nearly all gain meaningful qualifications. Scrutiny of pupils' work, lesson observations and the school's data show that overall pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' progress in PSHE is exceptionally good throughout the school, because staff provide many opportunities for social and personal development in lessons throughout the day. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from their starting points because of effective teaching and good management. Progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 is slightly stronger than elsewhere in the school, because teachers consistently ensure that the curriculum closely matches the needs and capabilities of the pupils at these stages.

In the lessons during the inspection, and in their discussions with the inspectors, pupils spoke strongly of their love of the school and their enjoyment of learning. Pupils behave well in lessons, work hard and want to do well. In a few lessons where activities are undemanding or the pace is slow, pupils demonstrate their maturity by not revealing their irritation or by misbehaving. Pupils requiring additional support for health or physical problems receive kind and gentle assistance in lessons so that they make the same overall good progress as others. Girls achieve slightly better than boys throughout the school, although there is little discernible difference in the achievement of pupils of different categories of need, such as severe or profound learning difficulties.

Pupils confirmed in discussions that they feel happy, secure and well cared for, this was echoed by parents and carers. Relationships within lessons are relaxed and friendly, and positively influence the quality of pupils' learning. Pupils are enthusiastic about staying fit and there is a good take-up of extra-curricular sports, such as the football club. All have very good opportunities to undertake frequent, regular, intensive physical exercise. Older pupils are aware of the risks of smoking and drug-taking. All this helps them make healthy lifestyle decisions. However, school lunches and packed lunches from home do not always contain a healthy option, and this limits pupils' ability to make sensible choices about their diet.

Within the school, pupils gladly take on responsibilities, such as being on the school council, and older pupils help younger children, for example as reading buddies. Pupils reach out into the local community mainly through one-off events, such as fundraising and visits to the community garden. Pupils are well prepared for leaving school by the good

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progress that they make in basic skills, their sound attendance and developing experience of working life in Key Stage 4 and post-16.

The positive atmosphere evident throughout the school reflects the pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development. Special assemblies effectively celebrate different aspects of religious faith and different cultures. Praise assemblies offer pupils good opportunities for prayer and for reflection on moral and cultural issues.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Classrooms are pleasant, tidy places where pupils can enjoy a good range of well-organised activities that change at a suitably brisk pace. There are very positive relationships within the classroom and the high number of adults constantly gives warm encouragement and realistic feedback. Because of this, the pupils feel confident to learn new things. In many lessons, assessment information is collected frequently and teachers use the information well to plan effectively and adapt carefully the activities so that they suit each pupil. In these lessons, teachers plan activities that will help pupils make rapid progress towards their individual learning targets. In a few lessons, however, learning

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activities are not always skilfully designed to maximise everyone's learning. As a consequence, pupils in these lessons are prevented from having quick success.

The curriculum, including that in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at post-16, provides a broad and balanced experience that reflects the individual needs of pupils. The activities effectively knit together social, vocational and academic features. Most staff use a broad range of strategies in order to meet the different identified learning needs of pupils. The school enriches the curriculum well, for example by arranging sailing trips and visits from local theatre groups and musicians as well as through the work of speech and language and occupational therapists. The school has used its specialist status well so that pupils receive intensive support to advance their ability to communicate. The school provides a good range of educational visits, including residential experiences, throughout their time in school. The school uses its good partnerships with its neighbouring schools to enable an increasing number of pupils to gain social and academic experience by regularly attending lessons in mainstream classes. These experiences increase pupils' academic, social and cultural understanding and boost their self-confidence in unfamiliar situations. Changes of staff have meant that the curriculum for music and religious education, although satisfactory, is not as strong as for other subjects. The school has recognised this and new coordinators have been appointed.

Pupils display trust and confidence in all the adults who care for them, and say they know who to talk to if they are worried. Families say how relieved they are that they can rely absolutely on the staff to take great care with their children and find the school very supportive of themselves and their children's needs. The school works hard to enable parents and carers to support their children at home through daily diaries, workshops and frequent meetings. There are good working partnerships with external agencies, including social services and health professionals. Attendance is monitored satisfactorily but the school's new procedures to promote and improve attendance, including the appointment of a family coordinator, have not yet resulted in significant improvement. Transition arrangements are good at all stages, including post-16. Students receive very good careers advice when they get ready to leave the school, and the school ensures that every student moves on to a productive future.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

All senior leaders share the same ambitious aspirations for improving the school's effectiveness. The headteacher has done well to establish himself as an effective leader of an already long-established team and to bring his own distinctive stamp on the running of

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the school and in driving improvement. His team has established effective systems to track pupils' progress and to identify any likely underachievement. The team robustly monitors and continues to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school improvement plan shows clearly how the school aims to develop further. To support the plan, leaders provide good opportunities for professional development and training for staff. The governing body provides well-focused challenge and has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. An audit for community cohesion has been carried out but the school is at an early stage of implementing its action plan. Nevertheless, there are a number of good outcomes for the school, such as the school's very effective outreach work with neighbouring schools.

Arrangements for protecting pupils and keeping them safe are good, with well-developed systems to minimise risk, including the close involvement of key agencies. There are clear policies and procedures that are made known through regular training. The governing body plays its part through its nominated governor in ensuring that safeguarding is given a high priority, although some minor administrative weaknesses in the paperwork were identified during the inspection. The school works effectively with a range of partners to guide pupils and support their families. This work has been enhanced by the recent appointment of a family coordinator to promote an even more effective interchange between home and school.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well by effectively reducing any variations in outcomes due to pupils' differing levels of need or background. The school works hard to make sure that all pupils are included in activities and no form of discrimination is evident.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Achievement for the very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress in all areas of learning. The school has a very effective partnership with the local authority Portage service. This means that from the start there are good arrangements, including home visits and flexible timetables, to reassure families and to ensure that children settle in quickly in school and feel at home. The children clearly enjoy the many activities which are provided in and out of the classroom. Good individual support means that the children are able to benefit from these activities. There is good planning that ensures that activities are well matched to the needs of each child, based on frequent observations of progress. Although the children are taught frequently alongside older pupils, staff have established effective routines and procedures for dealing with the mix of learning, therapeutic and medical needs. They enjoy being with other children and from an early age show an awareness of one another's differences and similarities. Staff give the children many opportunities to be as independent as possible while feeling safe in and around the school. Children form positive relationships with all the adults. The Early Years Foundation Stage area in the school provides a stimulating environment and good use is made of resources. However, the environment for outside play is not entirely suitable and conducive to learning because much of the area is concreted over. The school has recognised this and improvements are planned during the Easter break 2011. The school keeps parents and carers fully informed of the progress their children make. Parents and carers receive much-valued encouragement and guidance as to how to support their children's learning at home. Children and their families benefit from the good leadership and management of this stage.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Students at post-16 achieve well because of effective provision, leadership and management. There is a very good partnership with the local Connexions service that ensures that transition arrangements are smooth for students as they move up from the main school, and for when they leave. Staff give students good support so that they develop increasingly sensible attitudes and a mature approach to their work and to life in general. The students' good social skills are evident in the contributions they make to the school council and to the support they regularly provide to younger pupils. Staff extend and find evidence of students' achievements well through the use of accredited courses and experiences of work-related learning. Many of the activities are based on students'

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choices and aspirations. Through such programmes, students develop the key skills for life which they will require in their next phase of education, training or residential provision. Students enjoy good curricular opportunities which enable them to develop practical skills, such as motor mechanics and bricklaying. Teaching is effective and support staff are proactive, stepping in as necessary to encourage and involve students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The percentage of parents who responded the Ofsted questionnaire was about average when compared to similar schools nationally. The comments made by parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire reflected their high levels of satisfaction and their appreciation of the support that they feel they receive from the school. With very few exceptions, these parents and carers echoed the view formed by inspectors, through meeting with parents and carers, and through examining the school's survey evidence, that this is a school which has established a good rapport and partnership with parents or carers and provides them with effective support. The following comments represent the views of many: 'any child with special needs who gets to Bidwell Brook is very fortunate'; 'a very approachable and fantastic school'; 'we cannot praise everything about it highly enough'. A few parents and carers said that they do not receive as much information as they would like and also have concerns about the progress their children are making. The same few felt that the school is not fully supporting their child's learning. Through observations, discussions with other parents and analysis of information, the inspection team concluded that overall there were good arrangements in place to keep parents informed including emails, telephone calls and home-school diaries. The team found that progress is generally good and that there is good support for pupils' learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bidwell Brook School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 87 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	79	2	14	1	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	79	3	21	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	71	1	7	0	0	2	14
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	64	3	21	1	7	1	7
The teaching is good at this school	10	71	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	50	4	29	0	0	2	14
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	64	4	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	7	50	4	29	0	0	1	7
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	64	3	21	1	7	1	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	64	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	71	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	79	2	14	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	71	3	21	1	7	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bidwell Brook School, Totnes TQ9 6JU

You may remember having two visitors recently who came to see your work. We enjoyed coming to your school very much. Thank you for helping us to find out about your school. It was a great pleasure to meet so many of you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Bidwell Brook School is a good school that helps you to learn well and make good progress. You enjoy coming to school and you feel safe when you get there. The staff care for you well, and teachers do a good job of making learning enjoyable. This helps you to grow into level-headed and mature young people. You do interesting things in and out of school, such as sailing and fundraising. We enjoyed looking at the photographs of what you have done and the records of what you have achieved.

The people who run the school, like your headteacher, do a good job. They, and all the staff, work hard to help you. It is important that all who work with you help you to make as much progress as you can. I have asked your headteacher and the staff to make sure that they all make more use of your targets in lessons and help you to know them too. I have asked them to check up more often on what you have learned. This will help you to learn even faster. I have asked the school to make sure that you all know even more about the different people that live in the United Kingdom and other countries, and how you can help everyone within and beyond the community to come even closer together.

Perhaps you can help by letting staff know if you have learned something new or by asking what your targets are if you forget them.

I am sure that you will all try your best and I hope that you will do well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee

Lead inspector

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